

STATEMENT OF ADA E. DEER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY - INDIAN AFFAIRS,
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AT THE OVERSIGHT HEARING BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES SENATE, ON THE
"CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN YOUTH, INCLUDING ALCOHOL AND
SUBSTANCE ABUSE, VIOLENCE, EDUCATION AND FAMILY VALUES,
ENVIRONMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES".

March 7, 1995

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here to speak to the many challenges facing American Indian and Alaska Native youth today. My staff who attended your hearing on February 9 were moved by the testimony provided by the eight young people. At the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) we are doing our part to alleviate the pain and alienation faced by our youth, and we realize there is much, much more that all of us can do.

I have with me today Ms. Joann Sebastian Morris, Acting Director, Office of Tribal Services; Dr. James Martin, Office of Indian Education Programs; and Mr. Theodore Quasula, Chief, Division of Law Enforcement. They will assist me in responding to any technical questions the Committee may have.

We have incorporated detailed information in this formal testimony, which we ask be entered into the record, to demonstrate the range of programs and activities that support American Indian and Alaska Native youth and families within several of our offices: Tribal Services, Education, Law Enforcement, and Alcohol and Substance Abuse.

As agents of the Federal Government, it is our duty and responsibility to do all we can to improve circumstances for Indian youth. The multiple challenges they face are the direct result of historical policies and practices of our Government. In my testimony I will cite examples of current programs and innovations geared to the challenges of American Indian and Alaska Native youth.

Risk Factors

Too many Indian children grow up in families where risk factors are high, such as: poverty, rural isolation, cultural alienation, poor health, and low educational attainment of parents. They enter adulthood without the necessary skills or motivation to contribute to their communities. They will be poorly equipped to reap the benefits or meet the responsibilities of parenthood, citizenship and employment. The consequences of being raised amid multiple risk factors reach far beyond individual lives. The future of Indian communities as sovereign nations and their economic well-being depend as much on Indian youth who are ill educated, alienated, or poor, as on those who are healthy and otherwise more advantaged. For Indian Nations, the years to come will be less safe, less caring, and less culturally intact unless we act.

But our action must be thoughtful, broad-based, and sustained. The problems that currently plague some Indian children and threaten many more have evolved over time and will not disappear overnight. Solutions will depend on strong tribal leadership and the concerted efforts of every sector of Indian society -- individuals, extended families, communities, and government at every level. They will require creative Federal and tribal policies, wise investments of Federal and tribal resources, and the significant commitment of time and attention by tribal governments to the needs of Indian children and their families. It is critical that tribal governments, in partnership with Federal agencies, go forward to spark Indian communities to act upon the agenda our Indian children deserve.

Where We Are

It is unfortunate that we continue to cite alarming statistics such as the

following. However, such data substantiate the need for greater involvement by local communities, tribal governments, the Federal Government, and other concerned parties.

In 1994, BIA Social Services received notice that State courts granted 46 adoptions of Indian children, terminated the rights of 50 Indian parents, and issued 155 notices of abuse and neglect affecting only off-reservation youth.

BIA Social Services received 31,901 child abuse complaints in 1993. In 1994, the number of complaints dropped to 25,919. This reduction is not necessarily due to a decrease in incidents, but is influenced by the decrease in the number of tribes reporting to the BIA.

Last year, BIA Law Enforcement investigated 442 crimes in which children were victims, including sexual contact, incest, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and felony sexual molestation.

In a nine month period ending July 1994, 35,914 Indians were incarcerated in tribal and BIA detention facilities: most were charged with alcohol related offenses and most were intoxicated at the time of their arrest.

In a 15 month period ending December 1994, 13,932 juveniles were placed in detention facilities, an average of 29 per day. Of the 67 detention facilities operated by the tribes or BIA, only 96 beds are available in juvenile-only facilities, and 241 in adult facilities.

The BIA criminal investigation unit has identified more than 180 gangs in Indian country, with activities ranging from showing colors and

painting graffiti, to theft, possession of firearms, sale of narcotics, and drive-by shootings.

Facilities and services for youthful offenders are almost non-existent in Indian country.

Understaffed police departments are overwhelmed with complaints. In many localities law enforcement has been reduced to simply ensuring that all reports are properly investigated.

Last year, 526 drug cases were reported in Indian country. 578 persons were arrested and citations issued, and over 10,000 pounds of marijuana were seized, along with crack cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines.

80% of suicides and attempted suicides among Indian youth are alcohol or drug-related.

A considerable number of Indian children in special education are Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/FAE) or affected by other Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD). Six (6) times more Indian infants are born with FAS/FAE than the general population.

Youth nationwide are at risk due to declining family values, social alienation and economic disparity. Nevertheless, the above statistics indicate the range of challenges faced by contemporary Indian youth.

What We Have Learned

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is only one of the players who is and should be actively seeking solutions to the challenges facing Indian youth; equal partners

include tribal leadership and the Congress. An orchestrated approach to meeting the needs of Indian communities requires a coordination of effort and resources.

We believe that tribal governments, communities and families can share the responsibility for addressing the challenges youth face. Economic development, social service, education, and law enforcement programs -- no matter who runs them -- will not be successful without community ownership. Local involvement coupled with a Federal commitment is the key to providing a future for our Indian youth.

At a time when the Federal Government is seeking ways to reduce its presence, the BIA must take every opportunity to partner with tribes and other federal entities to meet its obligations to tribal people, especially the youth. Some of the collaborative efforts of the BIA are listed below.

BIA Child Protection provides funding to BIA Law Enforcement to support six security officers, responsible for conducting background checks on prospective staff.

Representatives from BIA and IHS meet quarterly as the National Child Protection Team.

Memoranda of Agreement are in effect between BIA and IHS to work on child abuse issues and other health and social issues.

A Memorandum of Agreement is in the final draft stage between BIA Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse and IHS to work jointly on prevention issues.

The Acting Director of the Office of Tribal Services (OTS) represents the Office of the Assistant Secretary on three inter-agency committees which meet quarterly: Inter-agency Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, Inter-agency Special Education and Disabilities Committee, and Inter-agency Council on the Mental Health of American Indian Youth. Other BIA staff also participate actively.

BIA Child Protection and IHS are jointly sponsoring a National Indian Family Preservation conference in April, 1995.

BIA Social Services is a co-sponsor with the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma of the National Summit on the Indian Family in May, 1995.

BIA OTS assisted the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) by compiling inter-agency recommendations which respond to a DHHS Office of the Inspector General audit. Recommendations address how the ACF can improve its services to Native Americans and Tribes.

BIA Social Services coordinates inter-disciplinary child protection teams developed at each area office, many of which include United States Attorneys and representatives from State social services agencies.

BIA efforts have resulted in tribal access to FBI fingerprint services for background investigations of potential employees.

BIA Law Enforcement has formed partnerships with the Department of Justice, FBI, and U.S. Attorneys Office to enhance investigation and prosecution of crimes in Indian country.

BIA Law Enforcement has initiated regional training in conjunction with

the IHS, U.S. Attorneys Office, Office for Victims of Crime, and FBI to address child abuse, family violence investigation, and victim/witness protection and intervention.

Promising Approaches

We believe the Federal Government has a special responsibility to support tribal efforts to provide for the safety of their children and communities in general. As part of its mission, the BIA is doing as much as possible with scarce resources, including implementing the following approaches and innovations.

BIA divisions, such as Education, Law Enforcement, and Social Services have representatives who assist in coordinating child protection initiatives.

The BIA maintains a national toll free child abuse and neglect reporting hotline (1-800-633-5155), which has proven an effective reporting mechanism.

Ongoing training of tribal and BIA staff on child abuse intervention, awareness and reporting is provided by Social Services, Child Protection, Judicial Services, OIEP and Law Enforcement.

BIA Child Protection continues to observe National Child Abuse Prevention month each April. In 1995, the BIA Blue Ribbon Campaign to Prevent Child Abuse and Family Violence is being facilitated by the Jemez Pueblo Child Protection Team.

A final report of the Cherokee Nation Child Abuse Prevention Project, jointly funded by BIA and IHS, is due shortly.

We are in the third and final year of a joint project with IHS to train therapists to treat adolescent sexual offenders.

BIA Social Services coordinates the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) program, which funds on- and off-reservation ICWA programs designed to stabilize and strengthen Indian families.

The Family and Child Education (FACE) Program provides families with parenting skills to nurture their children's development and readiness for school. The program also provides opportunities for parents to enhance their educational levels and promote cooperation between family support and social services agencies. While recognized internationally, resources exist to support the FACE program in only 23 BIA schools.

65 BIA funded schools participate in an Economic Development Initiative which promotes youth entrepreneurship, expanded career choices, and competition in a global economy.

One grant residential school is developing a therapeutic community school model which incorporates culture and tradition with an interdisciplinary therapeutic approach. Youth in these residential schools are among the most at-risk in the nation, and deserve the opportunity to achieve academically while their mental health needs are being addressed.

Another innovative approach, the Sherman Indian High School Wellness Model, incorporates some aspects of the therapeutic approach but is primarily designed to promote healthy life choices. The curriculum will address domestic violence, anger abatement, problem solving, self esteem, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, and social skills.

The Effective Schools Model is an important part of the BIA's school improvement initiative which places an emphasis on developing quality, culturally relevant curricula, training teachers and staff, and involving parents and the local community in the administration of the school.

BIA has initiated Drug Free Schools and Communities prevention programs at all 185 BIA funded elementary and secondary schools. The Department of Education selected 5 BIA schools for the Drug Free Schools Recognition Program as exemplary, comprehensive drug free programs.

Guidelines have been developed for the reporting of child abuse incidents at BIA funded schools, and minimum standards of character for background investigations have been developed for BIA and tribal programs.

OIEP and OCM are working jointly to address health and safety issues at all BIA funded schools.

A community mobilization training and technical assistance model was developed by the Pine Ridge community in conjunction with the BIA Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention, the result of which is a community-based approach to substance abuse prevention.

The Indian Police Academy sponsors Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)) courses to help officers create local substance abuse prevention programs.

The Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) courses at the Indian Police Academy help officers to develop local programs which

teach children how to recognize gangs and warn them of the possible consequences of joining gangs.

Due to their commitment to youth, many dedicated law enforcement officers implement prevention programs on their own, using personal resources. They have taken the lead in developing community sports activities, outdoor recreation, and other mentoring programs for youth.

More community-based solutions are needed, like the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's Walter Miner Law Enforcement Center, which incorporates Indian healing concepts, culture, education and social detoxification with detention, in an effort to integrate young detainees back into the community. Exemplary of the Planning of New Institutions (PONI) process, this facility reflects the involvement of the community in its planning, design, and operation. 58 tribes have applied for detention facilities under the PONI program.

More tribes and law enforcement officers are receiving training in community policing, a philosophy that unites communities and law enforcement.

Tribal judges have developed alternatives to incarceration simply due to a lack of facilities designed to deal with juvenile offenders.

Closing Statement

To meet the true needs of American Indian and Alaska Native youth, much greater emphasis must be placed on overall and comprehensive community development. An Indian trainer from my State of Wisconsin says that you can take a young tree from a diseased forest and nurture it back to health, but

when you put it back in its community, the forest, it will again become diseased. In like manner, we cannot focus solely on the needs of Indian youth without also addressing the needs of our communities as a whole.

I would like to emphasize that the Department and the BIA are interested in working with this Committee and other agencies to address the challenges faced by Indian youth. The Office of Tribal Services, Education, Law Enforcement, and Alcohol and Substance Abuse will continue to find partners with whom we can collaborate to share human and fiscal resources to achieve that goal.

This concludes my prepared statement. I and my staff will be pleased to answer questions the Committee may have.